

NAME:	COMPANY:	POSITION:	LOCATION:
Neil Saligrama	1Bill	Founder & CEO	Melbourne, Australia

IN FOCUS



CONNECTING THE WORLD

[INSPIRE](#) [INNOVATE](#) [INVEST](#) [INDULGE](#)

COMPARE & CONNECT AND 1BILL FOUNDER AND CEO NEIL SALIGRAMA HAS BEEN HELPING AUSSIES SAVE TIME AND MONEY ON THEIR BILLS FOR CLOSE TO A DECADE – AND NOW HE'S READY TO GO GLOBAL.



WORDS SABRINA ROGERS-ANDERSON

When Neil Saligrama founded compare & connect in 2014, he was on a mission to disrupt the utility connection industry. Until that point, Australians who wanted a better deal on their electricity or internet had to place tedious and time-consuming calls to different providers to obtain quotes.

"It was a cryptic and confusing market and it could take 40 minutes on the phone to switch one service," explains Saligrama. "With compare & connect, people could make one phone call and compare numerous different providers to find the best deal. We brought choice into the market."

In 2016, compare & connect partnered with Fairfax's digital real estate portal Domain.

How to upload your bills to 1bill



"We started building fully embedded integrations around a number of proptech businesses and intermediary software systems, which help real estate companies operate their businesses efficiently," says Saligrama. "We started graduating from our typical sales business into an SME technology business."

After buying back Domain's stake in the company in 2019, compare & connect focused on going fully digital.

A SINGLE PLATFORM

"We wanted people to be able to easily compare utilities and connect four or five services, including electricity, gas, phone and internet, in a few minutes on a single platform," says Saligrama.

"From an entirely manual business in 2014, we've now reached the point where 100 percent of our services are generated electronically and 80 percent are completed through online end-to-end capability."

"IT'S THAT OPTIMISTIC MINDSET AND ENDURANCE TO KEEP GOING FORWARD NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS THAT WILL MAKE YOU A VERY SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR."

Harnessing the technology used to automate compare & connect's operations, Saligrama and his team recently launched an end-to-end bill management app called 1Bill.

"All the things we thought we couldn't automate in the compare & connect phase, we've now taken to an app level that can integrate into banks," says Saligrama.



"1Bill can read bills automatically, pay bills, alert people when there are better energy deals available and switch providers. It's a fully digital business and I'm very proud of the fact that we've kept our workforce on shore."

In the next two-to-three years, Saligrama's focus is squarely on growth both in Australia and across the world.

GOING GLOBAL

"Our objective in Australia is to grow compare & connect from our current 25 percent market share to 35 percent and to grow [sister company] Fast Connect in New Zealand," he explains.

"We also have multiple B2B partners, including Compare the Market, Ray White Group and Loan Market Group, that use our technology to enable their comparisons. As for 1Bill, we have plans to launch it in North America, Asia and Africa and to expand this capability across other parts of the world, too. We're in talks with a promising international partner."

"IT'S A FULLY DIGITAL BUSINESS AND I'M VERY PROUD OF THE FACT THAT WE'VE KEPT IT ALL ONSHORE."

While Saligrama has faced many challenges as he's built his businesses from the ground up, his passion for community is his driving force.

"My business has given me an amazing opportunity to give back," he says. "We connect over 200,000 services a year and each one of them is saving Australians time or money or both."

"Over the last 10 years, I've employed a couple of thousand people and the business has put hundreds of millions of dollars back into our customers' pockets. That just gives me an amazing feeling."

Saligrama is also deeply dedicated to creating a strong company culture that puts employees first. "Because we have been a very organic business since we started and everybody's hands-on, it has really built a strong foundation between managers and employees," he explains.



"That culture element for us has been about making sure we carry our employees at the same wavelength we carry our shareholders. If you put your employees first, they'll look after your customers and you balance the interest across shareholders and employees. You need to hold your people and make them feel the place belongs to them."

As his companies expand, Saligrama continues to uphold the unwavering work ethic that has gotten him this far.

"I always say that the best dividend for your work is more work," he says. "You never focus on the result; you focus on the process. If your focus is on the result, more often than not, you'll lose it. So, you need to focus on what you can control."

"It's that optimistic mindset and endurance to keep going forward, no matter what happens, that will make you a very successful entrepreneur."